

are well observed by Kastorsky evoking the correct mood and developing the lovely melody that is first heard in the overture.

*Mazeppa*. **The three treasures**. Kocubei is imprisoned in Mazeppa's castle and initially refuses, even under torture, to tell where his treasure is hidden. A highly dramatic scenario, and part of a plot that is historical in content, this aria calls for long sustained phrasing in a demanding tessitura which Kastorsky sings in masterly fashion.

*Die Zauberflöte*. **In diesen heil'gen Hallen**. The High Priest Sarastro leads Pamina into the temple. He tells her that should Tamino be successful in all his trials, peace will reign and they will be re-united. Sonority and gravitas are essential here, and Kastorsky's excellent legato and remarkable lower register (including the low D natural) are indeed impressive.

**TheWolves and Before the Voyevoda**. Anton Rubenstein is probably best remembered for his opera *the Demon*, which was once so popular, particularly in Eastern Europe. The first of these attractive songs is dramatic in content and Kastorsky's sepulchral tone is filled with dread. The second song contains a solemn narrative type melody, interrupted by some demanding dramatic phrases.

**When we cross the river** is a traditional and very attractive folk melody sung as a duet with a tenor and is probably the kind of material that Kastorsky popularised in his recitals. The tenor may be one of Kedroff brothers with whom Kastorsky formed a famous vocal ensemble.

Massenet's well known **Elégie** is usually sung by a higher voice, but Kastorsky (like his bass colleague Chaliapin), has real feeling for the text and makes much of the haunting melody. He sings the high lying parts easily, ending on a sustained D.

**True liebe**. This song exists in many versions recorded in German by famous Western European lieder singers. Yet Kastorsky's sincere interpretation, even though sung in Russian, seems equally valid.

In the remaining songs Kastorsky demonstrates his varied skills : a rousing **Die beiden Grenadiere**, with its inserted strains of the Marseillaise; rapid articulation in **The Travelling song** which tells of the bustle and excitement surrounding a train and its passengers just before it's departure; brooding and menace in **Song of the dark wood**, and in **For the shores of your Fatherland** a slow melody that shows his legato to perfection.

*Boris Godunov*. **Pimen's Monologue**. The aged monk is seen at the beginning of the opera in his cell. He is completing his chronicles on the history of Russia. Kastorsky admirably projects Pimen's old age and his many years of suffering.

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Nimbus Records

VLADIMIR KASTORSKY



PRIMA VOCE

## Vladimir Kastorsky 1871-1948

[1]	LES HUGUENOTS, Meyerbeer - Benediction			3.11
	Rec: 1909	Matrix: 7775L	Gramophone	Cat: 3-22860
[2]	LES HUGUENOTS, Meyerbeer - Piff, Paff			3.17
	Rec: 1908	Matrix: 7776L	Gramophone	Cat: 3-22826
[3]	LES HUGUENOTS, Meyerbeer - Qu'en ce riche			3.03
	Rec: 1908	Matrix: 7871L	Gramophone	Cat: 3-22872
[4]	LAKMÉ, Delibes - Lakmé, ton doux regard			4.02
	Rec: 1908	Matrix: 402m	Gramophone	Cat: 022127
[5]	FAUST, Gounod - Vous qui faites l'endormie			3.32
	Rec: 1906	Matrix: 4990L	Gramophone	Cat: 3-22575
[6]	THE QUEEN OF SPADES, Tchaikovsky - Tomsy's aria			2.29
	Rec: 1906	Matrix: 4992L	Gramophone	Cat: 3-22554
[7]	RUSLAN AND LYUDMILA, Glinka - From the dark shroud of eternity			4.38
	Rec: 1908	Matrix: 273m	Gramophone	Cat: 022087
[8]	PRINCE IGOR, Borodin - No sleep, no rest			4.19
	Rec: 1908	Matrix: 403m	Gramophone	Cat: 022126
[9]	MAZEPPA, Tchaikovsky - The three treasures			2.37
	Rec: 1908	Matrix: 7843L	Gramophone	Cat: 3-22831
[10]	DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE, Mozart - In diesen heil'gen Hallen			3.31
	Rec: Nov. 1908	Matrix: 6939r-2	Gramophone	Cat: 4-22082
[11]	Rubinstein - The Wolves			3.34
	Rec: 1906	Matrix: 4995L	Gramophone	Cat: 3-22576
[12]	Traditional - When we cross the river			3.03
	Rec: 1909	Matrix: 6851r	Gramophone	Cat: 2-24070
[13]	Rubinstein - Before the Voyevoda			3.07
	Rec: Nov. 1909	Matrix: 6949r	Gramophone	Cat: 4-22036

*\*\*The Levik Memoirs: An Opera Singer's Notes.*

Translated by Edward Morgan. Published by Symposium Records. ISBN 0 9524361 1 6

This excellent compilation of extremely rare recordings, in fine condition, was made possible due to the long term relationship that Prima Voce has enjoyed with the St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music and also the assistance of Mr Bill Breslin the noted collector of Russian vocal recordings. The present selection shows that Kastorsky easily achieved the style required for the 19<sup>th</sup> Century European operas that dominated the theatrical scene at the Mariinsky and St. Petersburg. He is also heard in excerpts from the Russian works in which he had an even greater success. Finally, and of particular note, there are a few of the folk and art-songs he introduced to the public in his many recitals.

In Meyerbeer's once very popular opera *Les Huguenots* Kastorsky is provided with an opportunity to show the wide vocal range which enabled him to sing music written for both baritone and bass. We hear an attractive but not over obtrusive vibrato – one that would effectively project the voice in a large opera house. He sings the arias of Count Nevers (baritone) **Benediction** and **Qu'en ce riche**, and of Marcel (bass) **Piff Paff**. His voice is resonant and effective from top to bottom with the different characters well delineated by thoughtful variation in vocal colour.

*Lakmé*. **Lakmé ton doux regard** is sung by the Brahmin priest Nilakantha who wishes to find out the name of the English officer who had dared to enter the temple and make love to his daughter Lakmé. Here Kastorsky's voice is, as always, placed perfectly, the high notes particularly have an easy quality that enables him to sustain the beautiful melody and testing musical line.

*Faust*. Mefistofeles's serenade **Vous qui faites l'endormie**, is sung to Martha, the heroine's old nurse, as a distraction whilst Faust is seducing Marguerite. It is delivered with an insouciance that is both amusing and stylistically correct - the Satanic element is not overplayed.

*The Queen of Spades*. Count Tomsy, Hermann's friend, amuses the assembled gamblers by singing a ballad before the game of cards that is to lead to Hermann's death by suicide. This was one of the Russian roles in which Kastorsky was most admired.

*Ruslan and Lyudmila*. **From the dark shroud of eternity**. An air of mystery should, and does, surround this narrative given by Finn the good magician, who reveals to Ruslan that the abductor of Ludmila is the dwarf Chernamor.

*Prince Igor*. **No sleep, no rest**. There is a brooding intensity and longing in his singing of this famous scene, when Prince Igor contemplates his captivity and thinks of his wife. The dynamics

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Kastorsky also followed more purely intellectual pursuits; he enrolled as an external student at the St. Petersburg University where he studied philology and natural sciences, both subjects becoming a vital asset in his constant search for perfect articulation and a beautiful vocal sound.

On 19 May 1908 at the age of only 37 it was Kastorsky, as a member of the Moscow Imperial Opera Company, who created the role of Pimen in *Boris Godunov* at the sensational first performance in Paris. It was an all star cast that included Chaliapin as the Tsar. Dimitri Smirnov sang the false Dimitri, the Marina was Natalie Yermolenko, Ivan Alchevsky sang Shuisky, Vasili Sharanov was Varlaam and Mitrofan Chuprinikov sang the Innocent. Throughout his professional career Kastorsky would always be so fortunate and talented to appear with singers of international repute, particularly at the Marinsky.

The rôles that Kastorsky undertook sometimes crossed over with those sung by a bass-baritone; Gudal in *The Demon*, Dosifey in *Khovanshchina*, Tomsky in *Pique Dame*, *Ivan Susanin*, the Miller in *Rusalka*, Nilakantha in *Lakmé*, Hagen in *Götterdämmerung*, King Mark in *Tristan and Isolde*, the Count in *Marriage of Figaro* and as already noted Pimen in *Boris Godunov*. His voice was blessed with an individual timbre, something that every singer hopes for, and his secure, self-taught technique enabled him to sing for over four decades. He even embraced those heaviest Wagnerian rôles which are known to have been the cause of early decline in some notable singers. Indeed Kastorsky's vocal method and his style of singing was frequently compared with that of Mattia Battistini, - the universally acknowledged epitome of Italian 'Bel Canto' - and with such a comparison made, no greater praise was considered possible.

Kastorsky was appointed Professor of Singing at the Leningrad Conservatory after the Russian Revolution. Although no famous singers emerged from his classes, many benefited from his wise council. He was still singing major roles in the theatre in 1930, and when he retired from the stage he formed an operatic quartet with Mitrofan Chuprinikov and the Kedrov brothers. Kastorsky became a committed exponent of folk music, always including the national songs of his native land in his recital programmes. For almost another decade he divided his time between teaching and touring the provinces with the vocal quartet. He was still performing well in his seventy-fifth year, and shortly before his death he was invited (as a special guest) to sing a small role at the Bolshoi in Tchaikovsky's *Pique Dame*, a wonderful testament to his longevity as a singer of the front rank. One of the most admired artists of his generation Vladimir Kastorsky died in Leningrad on 2 February 1948.

\*For a compilation of these singers see:  
*Treasures of the St. Petersburg State Museum Prima Voce CD NI 7915/6*

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14	Massenet - Elégie Rec: Nov. 1909	Matrix: 6951r	Gramophone	Cat: 4-22047	2.24
15	Brahms - True liebe Rec: Nov. 1909	Matrix: 6958r	Gramophone	Cat: 4-22053	2.03
16	Hertel - Greeting Rec: 1908	Matrix: 7812i	Gramophone	Cat: 2-24049	3.04
17	Schumann – Die beiden Grenadiere Rec: Nov. 1909	Matrix: 424	Gramophone	Cat: 022134	4.06
18	Glinka - Autumn Rec: not known	Matrix: 3133	Gramplastrest	Cat: 2241a	2.28
19	Glinka - Travelling song Rec: not known	Matrix: 3134	Gramplastrest	Cat: 2241a	2.31
20	Borodin – Song of a dark wood Rec: not known	Matrix: 3136	Gramophone	Cat: 223Bb	2.40
21	Dargomyzhsky - The old corporal Rec: 1939	Matrix: 1379	Gramophone	Cat: 4-240a	4.00
22	Borodin - For the shores of your Fatherland Rec: 1939	Matrix: 1381	Gramophone	Cat: 4-240b	3.37
23	<b>BORIS GODUNOV</b> , Musorgsky – Pimen's Monologue Rec: not known	Matrix: not known	Gramplastrest	Cat: 5629/5630	4.52

**Total playing time**

**76.09**

All records courtesy of The Director and Staff of St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music.  
With thanks also to Bill Breslin for his kind assistance.

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Series consultant Norman White. <http://www.wyastone.co.uk>

**Vladimir Kastorsky** was one of a number of outstanding singers associated with the Imperial Russian Opera in St. Petersburg, and, like so many other Russian artists active at that time his records (made in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century) have always fascinated the collector. Possessing an exceptional voice he was one of an important quartet of basses - the others being Feodor Chaliapin, Lev Sibiriyakov, and Konstantin Serebriakov - who saw the commencement of an artistic and vocal line that extended into the late 20<sup>th</sup> century with Alexander Kipnis, Mark Reizen, Maxim Michailov, Ivan Petrov, Artur Eizen, Boris Stokalov, Evgeny Nesterenko and Paata Buchuladze. What they had in common was the ability to sing the demanding roles requiring gravitas that has for the most part dominated the Russian operatic scene.

Russian repertoire had not always been so common: at the turn of the century native singers and distinguished colleagues from Italy and France, who frequently appeared as guests\* more often sang in the popular Italian, French and German repertoire which had been the main core of performances since Catherine the Great. However, it was the generation of artists of which Kastorsky was a part who pushed the cause of a national school of Russian opera, excelling in what have now become the familiar works of Tchaikovsky, Dargomizhsky, Musorgsky, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov and Rubenstein. Had he performed outside Russia Kastorsky himself might well have become even more universally acclaimed than his great colleagues and rivals Chaliapin and Sibiriyakov, for it is reported that in certain roles he surpassed them both.

Vladimir Kastorsky was born on 14 March 1871 in Bolschoi Soly the twelfth son of a country priest. The young Volodya was given the nickname Konfetka by his father. The family was very poor and Konfetka helped the family income by singing in a church choir. He developed an outstanding treble voice and was sent to a church school at Kostroma and later to the seminary at Penza. He managed to continue singing whilst his voice was breaking, and, like most trebles, his voice eventually developed as a bass. Kastorsky had a deep commitment to improving his vocal technique and went as often as possible to see touring opera company performances and vocal recitals. Aged twenty he travelled to St. Petersburg where in spite of real poverty he joined Melnikov's choir: the position was unpaid but gave him the opportunity to hear many of the greatest singers of his era from the wings of the Marinsky Theatre. There he learnt by example something about vocal technique; he constantly questioned the singers, even asking to feel the movement of their diaphragms and trace the resultant position of the larynx on the expelling of the breath. Once it became clear that serious study was necessary he started to take vocal instruction from Professor Gabel, one of Russia's best teachers. The relationship was not successful: the former singer turned critic Sergei Levik wrote in his memoirs\*\* that Kastorsky

did not agree with his maestro's methods of constantly directing the sound into the 'mask' (the forward sinus cavities of the skull). He was told that he had 'neither the capability nor voice to continue' and was dismissed from the class. Gabel's decision by was probably the best thing that could have happened to Kastorsky. He joined a tour given by the senior students of the Conservatory, making his debut in the small role of the Baron in *La Traviata*. He was also given the opportunity to sing Gremin in *Eugen Onegin*, the Miller in *Rusalka* Mephistopheles in *Faust* and other roles, but unfortunately he was taken ill and his colleagues left him in the care of a local hospital in Mogilev. He eventually returned home where his distressed father made him promise that he would stop singing the role of the Devil - a promise Konfetka really had no intention of keeping.

Kastorsky became the choirmaster of a chorus sponsored by a rich textile manufacturer named Krasilschikov, in Rodnik. This earned him some money and became a turning point in his career. Krasilshchikov had been a singer. He was impressed with his choirmaster's voice, gave him lessons, and, after one year sent him to audition at the Marinsky. Sadly the composer Nápravník, who was a staff conductor there and was on the audition panel, was not impressed. Kastorsky also auditioned at the Bolshoi where, to his consternation, he was turned down again. Undeterred, and after a further brief period of study with Krasilschchikov, he presented himself to the Marinsky once more. This time the audition was held in public and the young bass received an ovation.

Kastorsky made his professional debut as the priest in Serov's *Rogneda*. Despite his total lack of theatrical experience his talents were recognised and he progressed to Zlatogor in *Queen of Spades* and the Chaplain in Cui's *The Saracen*. For the role of the chaplain he studied both the priests in the local churches and the costumes of the period in which the opera was set. Such careful preparation gave confidence to his performances and he enjoyed a fine artistic success. Before long he gave his first performances as Susanin (*Life for the Tsar*) and Ruslan (*Ruslan and Lyudmila*). They were enthusiastically received and became the signature roles for which he would always be best remembered at the Marinsky. Kastorsky was now considered a star performer and took part in many local premières - all the more remarkable for a singer with no formal Conservatoire training. Apart from the short time with Gabel and Krasilshchikov he had developed his own voice by constant practice, discussions with colleagues, and a self-imposed regime to develop his breathing. Kastorsky considered management of the breath to be the most important aspect of vocal technique. He followed the axiom of those famous Italian maestri who claimed 'Sai respirare, sai cantare' (If you know how to breathe, you know how to sing).

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|--|--|---|
| 1. <b>LES HUGUENOTS</b> 3.11<br>Meyerbeer – Benediction<br>r. 1909                         | 8. <b>PRINCE IGOR</b> 4.19<br>Borodin - No sleep, no rest<br>r. 1908             | 16. Hertel – Greeting 3.04<br>r. 1908                             |
| 2. <b>LES HUGUENOTS</b> 3.17<br>Meyerbeer – Piff, Paff r. 1908                             | 9. <b>MAZEPPA</b> 2.37<br>Tchaikovsky<br>The three treasures r. 1908             | 17. Schumann 4.06<br>Die beiden Grenadiere<br>r. 1909             |
| 3. <b>LES HUGUENOTS</b> 3.03<br>Meyerbeer – Qu'en ce riche<br>r. 1908                      | 10. <b>DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE</b> 3.31<br>Mozart – In diesen<br>heil'gen Hallen r. 1908 | 18. Glinka – Autumn 2.28  |
| 4. <b>LAKMÉ</b> , Delibes 4.02<br>Lakmé, ton doux regard<br>r. 1908                        | 11. Rubinstein 3.34<br>The Wolves r. 1906  | 19. Glinka – Travelling song 2.31                                 |
| 5. <b>FAUST</b> , Gounod 3.32<br>Vous qui faites l'endormie<br>r. 1906                     | 12. Traditional 3.03<br>When we cross the river<br>r. 1909                       | 20. Borodin 2.40<br>Song of a dark wood                           |
| 6. <b>THE QUEEN OF SPADES</b> , Tchaikovsky 2.29<br>Tomskey's aria r. 1906                 | 13. Rubinstein 3.07<br>Before the Voyevoda<br>r. 1909                            | 21. Dargomyzhsky 4.00<br>The old corporal r. 1939                 |
| 7. <b>RUSLAN AND LYUDMILA</b> , Glinka 4.38<br>From the dark shroud<br>of eternity r. 1908 | 14. Massenet – Elégie 2.24<br>r. 1909  | 22. Borodin – For the shores of your<br>Fatherland r. 1939        |
|  | 15. Brahms – True liebe 2.03<br>r. 1909  | 23. <b>BORIS GODUNOV</b> 4.52<br>Musorgsky – Pimen's<br>Monologue |
|  |  | <b>Total playing time 76.09</b>                                   |

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